

Blessed Beyond Belief

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[0:00] It would be great if you could have Ephesians back open, Ephesians 1. It's on page 1173 in the Church Bible.

You might know this program where celebrities dig into their past and then they see who they really are.

Danny Dyer went on to it. It's one of the most famous episodes because he came after all that digging. He found out who he really was and he was a descendant of King Edward III.

Quite amazing. Who are you? Who? Maybe you feel like Danny Dyer before.

He went on that program pretty blessed in life. Not royalty. Are you a Christian here today?

[1:16] Most of us are. And you probably know that you're at least a bit blessed because of that. But maybe only a bit.

Because life, even the Christian life, feels very ordinary, doesn't it? We kind of expect lights to be shining off us as we become Christians.

Fireworks to go off and we're doing miracles left, right and centre. Are we? Are we? No? We're decidedly normal.

Going to meetings, going to work, doing the school run, doing the washing up, taking the bins out.

Cooking tomato pasta for your grandkids on a Thursday evening. It's just so underwhelming, isn't it?

Maybe you think you kind of should know how good it is to be a Christian. But you just don't feel it.

[2:19] You just don't feel it right now. Maybe it's just a bit vague. It's a bit kind of head-knowledgy. It's a bit intangible. You know, all those big words that end in shun in the Christian life, redemption, justification, all those big things.

You just can't quite grasp what they are. Or worse, you're spiritually low right now.

Or life is more than heart. And being a Christian doesn't always solve it. And you think, is this it?

That's how the Ephesians feel. That's how the Ephesians feel.

Is this what Christianity gets me? You can't keep going in your faith like that. All that discouragement.

[3:49] Discouragement causes disbandment, doesn't it? I'll read that verse, actually, in chapter 3, verse 13. It's a key verse. I ask you then, therefore, do not be discouraged.

Other translations say, do not lose heart. But why? Well, that is why I'm so excited to bring you Ephesians this term.

We're going to get to see a God's eye view of us through the lens of Christ. To see who we really are in him.

Like Danny Dyer, you know, not a bit blessed. That's what you thought you were. Blessed beyond belief. Blessed beyond belief.

That is our identity in Christ. Not a bit blessed. Blessed beyond belief. Look at verse 3 of chapter 1. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

[5:01] He's just spilling over with praise. When you read this, that's the sense you get, isn't it? This passage is one sentence in the Greek. He can't even stop to take a breath. He's so excited.

And he wants that for us. And these blessings are in Christ. Do you see that? It's not saying how good you are. It's saying how good God is to you in Jesus.

Big difference. We share in his blessings. And Paul is raising our eyes to the heavens to look.

Blessed in the heavenly realms, it says. We don't feel blessed.

Because we can only see our crummy situations that we're in. How others define us. But we have a treasure trove of blessings. Not always here. In the heavens.

He says, look there. And lastly, every blessing. Not a little drip of blessings. A refreshing waterfall.

[6:07] And that's what I really hope Ephesians is going to be for us this term. We're going to see that we've got everything in Jesus. We're going to have our minds blown by what he has done for us and who we are in him.

We are blessed beyond belief. I want you to believe that. Because firstly, we're loved before time. Love before time. Look at verse 4. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ. In accordance with his pleasure and will. To the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

If you believe in Jesus today. Which is something that we all must do to be blessed. The Bible never sees us as passive. If your amazing God loved you and called you to be in his holy family.

[7:19] Not when you became a Christian. Not when you were born. Not when Jesus died on the cross.

Not even at the creation of the world. Before the creation of the world. That's what it says. He chose us with nothing good in ourselves to love us as his precious adopted children.

I think Paul would think it was a crying shame when we hear words like chose us and predestined. And they become this horrible controversial topic we try to avoid.

Maybe we're a bit scared of them. And we will dig into this topic a little bit more as a church family. At some point. Not right now though. But however you pass this out. Don't miss how encouraging this is.

Particularly when you are not feeling loved. Or maybe your family doesn't love you. Or you don't think God loves you. Look at the lot he's given me in life.

[8:32] He can't love me. Or when you think his love is a bit distant and a bit kind of lukewarm now. You need to know that God loved you before time began.

That's supposed to be an encouragement, a blessing. He says praise God for that. And it's the greatest love because it goes all the way back.

When we were children we said silly things to our parents, didn't we? You don't love me. You hate me. When something went a bit wrong. That's obviously so hurtful to parents.

Because normally parents do love their children very much. When it's really hard. When you were annoying. To get up in the night to feed you as a newborn.

And they even loved you in the womb. Maybe praying for you. Maybe even before you were conceived.

[9:39] Before you even existed. The greatest love goes all the way back. And let me just say some of us might not have experienced that kind of love.

And I'm really sorry if that's you. But look at this. There is a way where anyone can experience that kind of love. But infinitely better than that illustration there.

In the Lord Jesus. How good is this? Verse 5. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ. Before God said let there be light.

He said let there be love for my children that I love. My precious sons and daughters. He didn't need us. We didn't deserve it. But he loved unholy sinners enough to make us holy.

To call us to him. Full rights in the family. And you maybe are looking in on the Christian faith day. Maybe you are. You're so welcome here.

[10:43] But look at how good, how amazing, how gracious this love is. Don't you want this love? To feel this love. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus today.

And know how good that love is. Verse 6. To the praise of his glorious grace.

Loved before time. How wonderful. Secondly, caught up in creation renewal. Caught up in creation renewal.

Let's go just before verse 9. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ.

And what's that will, that purpose? Well, verse 10. To be put into effect when the time reached their fulfillment. To bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

[11:45] Now that's the plan that God has purposed in Christ before day dot. Heaven and earth glued back together again with Christ at the top.

And what exactly does that mean? I've made a few little diagrams here on the PowerPoint slide. It might help. Think back to Genesis. Okay. Heaven was with earth because God was with earth in a

very special way.

Walking with humanity in perfect unity. But then sin separated us. God and his creation separated us.

In one sense. But in Jesus, God has begun putting his creation back together. And this is amazing actually because I used to read verse 10 here.

It's an entirely sort of future thing. Way over in the future. But notice that little phrase. When the times reach their fulfillment. Do you see that? That underlying Greek phrase is in Galatians 4.

[12:52] It's quite a famous verse. When the fullness of time had come, God sent his son. That's when Jesus came when the fullness of time had come.

In his first coming. So, yes, verse 10 in Ephesians 1 back there. There is a future fulfillment to this, of course. We're not feeling a perfectly united new creation yet.

But the renewal has already begun in Christ. In the heavenly places. Christ is ruling over all.

And heaven and earth. And heaven and earth's renewal. Well, it's kind of begun. In him. In the spiritual realms.

And the amazing thing is that Christians are caught up in that. We are caught up in that. Have a look at verse 7. In him we have redemption through his blood.

[13:56] The forgiveness of sins. God could have started to renew his creation without including rebels like us. But if you trust in Christ.

You are caught up in that creation renewal. Reigning with Jesus now. As we'll go on to see in Ephesians. Because he died to include you.

He did forgive you. He redeemed you. But he redeemed you to catch you up in this. The amazing sacrifice of the Lord Jesus at the cross. Is the pivotal moment in history.

Enabling Christians to experience. This huge. Massive grace. That's on a cosmic scale. At the cost of his life.

To give us abundant life. And Jesus did that for you. If you trusted him.

[15:01] To include you in something. It's huge. It is huge, isn't it? I mean, what story do you really think that you are a part of?

It's good to ask that, isn't it? I'm not part of anything much. I'm kind of, I'm just a mum, you might think. Or, you know, I just work in this small little company. I'm just doing my A-levels.

I'm not special. Just a little old me. Going about my, maybe feels like a bit of an insignificant life.

Maybe. Maybe. See what story.

That you're caught up in. You're really caught up in. I love these words for another Christian I know. He says this.

The cosmos isn't united in Buddha. Or Mohammed. Or secularism. Or the UN. Everything.

[16:01] Heaven and earth. Under the headship and rule of who? Jesus. That is the greatest, most cosmic level story you could be a part of.

And all Christians are. All of you here who've trusted in Jesus. That's all of you. That is your position. That is your position. Do you think that cosmic level?

On a day to day? I don't. I don't. It's cosmic, isn't it? Grand. Massive. Point one, think further back.

Point two, think bigger. Caught up in creation. Renewal. To the praise of his glory.

And lastly, sealed for a sure hope. Sealed for a sure hope. Look down at verse 13. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

[17:11] When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.

To the praise of his glory. To the praise of his glory. We talked about the new creation. We talked about the new creation starting in Jesus, in the heavenly places.

And now we're talking about the new world that's promised to us in the future. And that's what the inheritance here, it talks about. That's what it is, verse 14.

You know, in the Old Testament, what was it? Well, it was the promised land. That was the

inheritance for God's people. Where God was with his people. So what is that for a Christian where God is with his people?

That's the new creation. That's heaven. And wonderfully, we are secured, sealed for it by the Holy Spirit himself.

[18:15] I'm sure you've all seen Toy Story. Woody, Woody, the main character here. Well, he has scribbled on the bottom of his foot. Andy. Why is that?

Because he's Andy's toy? No one else's. A scribble on the bottom of our foot, if you like. God's. No one else's. Sealed. You're mine. Forever. Inheritance for you. God. But what's great about this is that the Spirit, well, he is the deposit guaranteeing it.

Now, we put deposits down on a house to guarantee them, but this is way better. Because with Jesus, you actually own a bit of that inheritance now in the most real sense.

Because you have the point and the pinnacle of that inheritance. With you now. God himself. Living with you. You haven't got this thing way in the future and you haven't got any of it.

[19:24] You've actually got some of it. You've got the Holy Spirit himself. How horrible is it when we kind of doubt our salvation?

I think we've all been there. We don't really know it's coming. It feels a little bit in time. Oh, I don't really know if I've been good enough today or whatever. What a wonderful truth that we are sealed. We're sealed. It's guaranteed. We have God with us now. In the most real sense. The very moment that you trusted, genuinely trusted in the Lord Jesus.

It was never in doubt. Because the Holy Spirit is with you. Are you believing right now? It's never in doubt.

It's never in doubt. How wonderful is that? It's not based on what you do. It's by grace.

[20:32] We just believe, genuinely believe. That's it. We believe a weak message about a guy who died on the cross. It doesn't look very powerful, does it? The gospel. And that's all we've got to do.

Have you done that? To the praise of his glorious grace. Let's sum up.

Love before time. Caught up in creation renewal. Sealed for a sure hope. You might have picked this up. Past.

Present. Future. An eternity to eternity. Cosmic level. All time plan. That we're included in.

And that's what Paul is partly doing here. He's expanding our horizon. Blowing our minds. Now how on earth could you see these blessings today and think, oh, it's just a bit rubbish being a Christian, isn't it?

[21:34] It's a bit underwhelming. No! This is amazing. Look at the story you're part of. This is who you are in Christ. Blessed. Blessed. Beyond belief.

Beyond belief. And when you didn't think it could get any grander, do you know what it does? It does. Do you notice that little phrase at the end of each section there? I think this is a helpful little structural marker.

Verse 6. To the praise of his glorious grace. Verse 12. To the praise of his glory. Verse 14. To the praise of his glory. It's a plan for God to be praised.

That's the end goal of the whole universe. God getting the praise he deserves because he is the most gracious and loving God there is.

The only true God. And amazingly, we're included in that central plan for the whole universe for God to be praised. Does that make God some kind of egotistical megalomaniac?

[22:39] No. Do you know why? Because the greatest joy of the universe is to enjoy the greatest being in the universe forever.

And the greatest way to enjoy the greatest being in the universe is to praise. That's where our joy is always completed, isn't it?

In praise. Even the praise of his glory is ultimately kind of a blessing for us as well. We get to do the only thing in the universe that will ever truly satisfy us.

Forever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever. What a God. How mind-blowing it is to be a Christian. Do you feel that?

It's quite a lot of this stuff, isn't it? It's very grand. I mean, you didn't expect to feel this grand this morning, right? A bit much. A bit of spiritual indigestion.

[23:45] There's loads of stuff, you know. I do try to be clear in my talk, but I don't want to have too many things. But, you know, I've kind of leaned into this today. Maybe you do feel like it's worlds. That's the point. You're supposed to feel like that was a lot.

I am blessed beyond belief. I can't even remember all the things in the passage. Because we need to have our minds just blown to who we are in Jesus.

I'd like to end with a really amazing story that I heard recently. So Walt Disney apparently had a housemate.

And she was really well loved. She was actually kind of, came part of the family in a sense. She shared Christmases together. That kind of thing. And he wanted to bless her. And every now and then he gave, not an Amazon package, but it's the best thing I could find. He gave an envelope with some shares in the company of Disney. And he gave it to her somehow. [24:50] Do you know the crazy thing, though? With all these amazing shares in Disney, nine billion pounds worth. She never opened it. She never opened it.

In Christ, we have an envelope full of spiritual riches. Have you opened it? Have you opened it? Have you opened it when the Christian life is discouraging? When life is hard? When you are feeling spiritually numb? Like you feel like you should be really excited about all this Christian stuff. But you just can't at the moment. When everything about being a Christian just isn't worth the effort.

Have you opened the envelope? I had to start halfway through preparing this sermon on Friday because I had to help Immy load our old sofa into the van. I just felt like I couldn't get more mundane in life than that.

[26:00] That is like the most mundane thing ever. It just hit me. It just hit me. It just even there. That's not a spiritual moment, is it? I'm brightly shining as a Christian.

I was like, you know, there I am who God says I am in Christ. Even while loading that sofa into the van, even on the school run tomorrow, even when you're taking the bins out, you don't feel particularly blessed.

All those things that we say. You are blessed. You are blessed. You are blessed. You are blessed. If you trusted in Jesus today. Just reflect right now.

Have you been going through life with that unopened envelope? Be honest. Be honest. I think we all have to some extent, haven't we?

Where might that be where you could have that envelope open today? This week. This month. This month. Where it would be great to know that you are blessed beyond belief.

[27:11] Remember who you are in Christ. Rejoice in him. Blessed beyond belief.

Let's pray. Oh Lord God, we praise you. You are the one who deserves all the glory and the praise. And we look forward, Lord, to the end when you will be praised forever. And we get to do that. Thank you so much for what you have done for us in Christ and who we are in him. Lord, if there's anyone here today who hasn't put their trust in Christ and knows what it is to be blessed, Lord. Give them grace to come to you.

And Lord, we sometimes don't feel blessed. We don't have an over the envelope. But Lord, please help us to just know who we are. And how good you are. And to praise you forever.

[28:15] And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.